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PROBABLE MILITARY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA OVER THE NEXT 30 DAYS



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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PROBABLE MILITARY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA OVER THE NEXT 30 DAYS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable military and political developments in Indochina over the next 30 days.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. That no cease-fire agreement is reached at the Geneva Conference during the period of this estimate.
2. That French policy with respect to Indochina will not undergo a radical change for the worse within the next 30 days.

THE ESTIMATE

I. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. The fall of Dien Bien Phu has not precipitated a collapse of the French and Vietnamese military position in Indochina, but it has had a significant impact upon the attitudes toward the war of all participants. From the Viet Minh viewpoint, the fall of Dien Bien Phu has created a climate of victory which offers possibilities for further advances. We believe that the Viet Minh will raise their present level of operations, seeking to reduce further the French and Vietnamese will to continue the war, to improve the Communist basis for bargaining at Geneva, to prevent major redeployments of French Union forces, to prepare for major campaigns, and to exploit any opportunities for early victory. From the French Union viewpoint, the defeat at Dien Bien Phu has underscored the fact that the war cannot be won by French efforts alone. Accordingly, the main French effort appears at present to be directed toward maintaining and in any case preventing a collapse of the French Union military position before a cease-fire is negotiated at Geneva or the conflict is internationalized.

Military Developments Within the Next Two Weeks

2. Without redeployment of major units, the Viet Minh will have during the next two weeks the capability to increase the present level of their military operations throughout Indochina. In the Delta, the Viet Minh over the next two weeks will probably continue to mount attacks against French strong points and to cut temporarily the lines of communications between Hanoi and Haiphong. In addition, they will probably continue to augment their capabilities for sabotage and terrorist activities in Hanoi and Haiphong. However, while the scale of these activities will increase, they will probably not exercise these capabilities for sabotage and terrorism to the full during the next two weeks except in the event of large-scale military operations in this area. Outside the Delta, the Viet Minh will probably launch attacks in central Vietnam, conduct raiding operations in Laos, and increase guerrilla operations in Cambodia.
3. We consider that, despite the defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the French Union forces still

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retain the will to defend key points. In the Delta, the French almost certainly will possess for at least the next two weeks the capability to hold major positions. They have redeployed one mobile group from Laos to the Delta, and they apparently intend to regroup forces already within the Delta even though this may require the abandonment of some outlying Delta strong points. Outside the Delta region, the French will probably have the capability to hold most positions during the next two weeks although they may abandon certain positions in order to concentrate their troops in critical areas elsewhere.

Military Developments Within the Next 30 Days

4. If major units now at Dien Bien Phu are redeployed as rapidly as possible, the Viet Minh can within the next 30 days attain a capability for launching a heavy assault against French positions in the Delta. Preparations are now being made for moving the bulk of the Viet Minh units from Dien Bien Phu toward their bases in the Delta area, and there are indications that redeployment, has begun. We believe that approximately one division will remain initially in the vicinity of Dien Bien Phu. The major portion of the forces at Dien Bien Phu with their heavy equipment could not assemble in the Delta area before 7-15 June, although it is believed that their lightly-equipped units could complete the movement by 31 May. However, the gradual increase in intensity of rains during the month of June, combined with French aerial attacks on Route 41, may slow down the movement.

5. In addition to the force at Dien Bien Phu, the concentration of 17 battalions at Thai Nguyen, a point approximately 35 miles north of Hanoi, may be used to augment the Viet Minh capability for major attacks against the Delta. These units, 13 of which are regional battalions, appear to be undergoing advanced training. It is unlikely that these troops will be independently committed in major attacks on Delta strong points during the next 30 days. However, they might be

used to attack French static defense units or to fill out a major attacking force made up of units now at Dien Bien Phu.

6. If military considerations alone dictate, we estimate that the Viet Minh will not launch an all-out assault against the Delta during the next 30 days. The major factors militating against such an assault are: the requirement for reorganization and recuperation of the main striking force from Dien Bien Phu, the limited period of time to prepare for major assaults against fortified positions, the possibilities of delay in movement of artillery units into position, the onset of the rainy season with resultant supply difficulties, and the flooding of areas within the Delta which restrict routes for troop movements and areas of maneuver. The most important deterrent, however, is the French strength in manpower, firepower, and airpower. However, the Viet Minh might undertake an assault on the Delta because of political requirements in relation to Geneva, or on the basis of their estimate that French Union forces had become demoralized and that Viet Minh capabilities for assault combined with sabotage, terrorism, and insurrection might prove decisive in the Delta. Barring a serious deterioration of the will to fight of the French Union forces as a result of political developments in Indochina or elsewhere, we believe that the French would be able to counter or blunt such an assault within the next 30 days.

7. On the other hand, we anticipate that, short of mounting an all-out assault on the Delta, the Viet Minh during the next 30 days will increase their present level of operations and will attack French strong points in the Delta and elsewhere. Although we consider it likely that the French will suffer some reverses from attacks on this scale, we believe that they will be able to retain possession of most of their key strong points throughout Indochina, and will be able to keep open the lines of communications between Hanoi and Haiphong except for frequent but temporary interruptions.

8. It is possible that defections by Vietnamese units will occur during the next 30 days and will thus reduce the capabilities of French

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Union forces. Some Vietnamese from militia units are believed to have defected recently to the Viet Minh with their arms. On the other hand, since the fall of Dien Bien Phu, French and Vietnamese units have been engaged with no indication of impaired morale or will to fight. We estimate that, unless the Vietnamese become convinced that the French intend to sell out in Indochina or unless the Viet Minh achieve substantial military successes, the fighting capabilities of the French Union forces during the next 30 days will not deteriorate so severely as to preclude their employment as an effective military force. There is always the possibility, however, that some spectacular Viet Minh successes in the Delta would convince the native population and Vietnamese troops there that victory in the Delta was imminent, in which case an extremely rapid deterioration of the situation in north Vietnam would ensue.

Political Developments

9. Barring the unlikely event of a large-scale Viet Minh invasion or of a coup d'état, Laos and Cambodia will probably retain their present uncertain political stability during the next 30 days. The Laotian Government will almost certainly remain in power if the

French continue to provide it with support. The Cambodian Government will probably retain control and will continue its efforts to solicit direct US aid.

10. Political stability in Vietnam will probably continue to deteriorate during this period. In the absence of both Bao Dai and Buu Loc, factionalism has become extreme, and the Vietnamese central government is virtually paralyzed. It is possible that the Vietnam central government will disintegrate during the next 30 days. It is also possible that a coup may be attempted by General Hinh, who has obvious dictatorial ambitions. If the Vietnam central government should disintegrate, the French could almost certainly maintain civil control temporarily in the regions they occupy by working through Vietnamese regional governors and local officials. A large part of the Vietnamese troops in the French Union forces probably would continue at least temporarily to be responsive to the French High Command. Thus disintegration of the Vietnam central government, while it would complicate negotiations at Geneva, would almost certainly not cause an immediate collapse of French control in Indochina unless it were accompanied or preceded by a collapse of the French military position.

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